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Special China Bulletin
Number Three

The Call of the Hour

*A Sermon preached in the Brick Presbyterian Church
New York City
Sunday Morning, April 27, 1913*

BY

REV. WILLIAM PIERSON MERRILL, D.D.

Board of Foreign Missions
of the
Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.
156 Fifth Avenue, New York

CABLEGRAM

Sent by EDWARD T. WILLIAMS
Chargé d'affaires of the American Legation, Peking

To the Secretary of State, Washington, D. C.

“Secretary of State
Washington, D. C.

Peking, April 17th, 1913

The following message adopted by the Cabinet was sent yesterday by the Chinese Government to the provincial authorities and leaders of the Christian churches in China :

‘Prayer is requested for the National Assembly now in session ; for the new Government ; for the President who is to be elected ; for the Constitution of the Republic ; that the Government may be recognized by the powers ; that peace may reign within our country ; that strong and virtuous men may be elected to office and that the Government may be established upon a strong foundation.

Upon receipt of this telegram you are requested to notify all churches in your province that April 27th has been set apart as a day of prayer for the nation. Let us take part.’

WILLIAMS”

April 27th, 1913, was observed throughout the Christian world as a day of prayer for China.

The Call of the Hour

JOHN 12:23

*“The hour is come, that the
Son of Man should be glorified”*

THESE words come to us out of a scene in the distant past. I do not say the *dim* past ; for whatever may be true of other facts, the fact of the death of the Son of Man for the sin of the world shines forth from the history of the world's life with a growing rather than a diminishing radiance.

“ All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.”

The greatest fact in the life of man on the earth is the death of the Son of Man. No scene can be more powerful, more vital, than this, when our Lord stands facing the cross, and, deep in His soul, feels that it is worth while ; there lies His glory ; and, with joy and pain meeting in a sublime exaltation of spirit, He cries “ The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified.”

But the words come to us today with more than the dignity and grandeur derived from a long-distant past, with more even than the weight of richness which they have gathered through the years. They come with the ring of present, vital meaning ; they are now the words, not of the Master, but of His church ; rather let us say, they are the words, not of the Christ who walked the streets of Jerusalem long ago, but of the Christ who lives and loves to-day. He says to us, — not of that past hour, but of this present hour, — “ The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified.”

For there has come to the church to-day, the body of Christ, just such an experience as came to our Lord Jesus on this, the third day before His death. Do you recall the scene ? He has been teaching His followers, meeting the attacks of His enemies, talking with the crowd that surges through the

courts of the Temple. And now two of His disciples approach with the word that some Gentiles desire to see Him. Instantly there springs up in His heart that great love for the world, for the whole race of man, which He has felt compelled to repress, that He may do the needed work for Israel, and not wreck His mighty mission by moving too fast. How hard it must have been to confine His efforts and His words to His own land and race. I imagine no words ever came from Him more reluctantly than the saying, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But now from the far-reaching outer world, unsought as yet by Him, come men seeking Him. With "joy unspeakable and full of glory" He lifts His eyes from the things that lie at His feet and lets them rest on the far horizon. In this request of a few Gentiles He hears the stroke of a new and glorious hour. The time has come when the Son of Man must be glorified; and, in the light of that glory, death itself appears but a dark valley to be passed before the glory shall come.

I am sure all who are here are aware of the very remarkable action of the Chinese Government, in writing and telegraphing to the Christians of that nation asking them to set apart this day, April 27th, as a day of prayer for the Republic. I am sure the hearts of all true Christians have beat faster at the news. But it is doubtful if any of us have caught its full significance. It can scarcely be over-estimated. Something has come,—I will not say "has happened," for God's leading is too manifest in it for such a word to be appropriate,—something has come, in the religious life of man, which has never been known before. Under a divine impulse, following the lead of the Spirit of God, Christianity has gone out to all the world, seeking men, daring to take as its program the conversion of the kingdoms of the world into the

Kingdom of our Lord. But now, for the first time, a nation not yet Christian has definitely asked the prayers of Christians; and the action has been taken so simply, with such absolute directness, such utter lack of artifice, as to disarm all suspicion of hidden motives, or adroit attempts to influence the political action of the Christian nations.

I am fortunately able to give you the very wording of the message sent by the Chinese Government to all the Provinces of the Republic, and to every Chinese city in which there is a body of Christians :

“Prayer is requested for the National Assembly now in session; for the new Government; for the President who is to be elected; for the Constitution of the Republic; that the Government may be recognized by the Powers; that peace may reign within our country; that strong and virtuous men may be elected to office; and that the Government may be established upon a strong foundation. Upon receipt of this telegram you are requested to notify all churches in your Province that April 27th has been set aside as a day of prayer for the Nation: let us take part.”

Am I making too much of this matter when I say that it means, in the life of the church, what the visit of these Greeks meant in the life of Jesus? We recall the long and weary years during which faithful men labored and apparently made not the slightest impression upon the impassive and immobile civilization and people of China. Morrison “against hope believed in hope,” keeping up his faith only because he believed in the Living God, with whom nothing is impossible. Down to some fifteen years ago, China was considered the stronghold of paganism. It is but a few years since the Boxer movement threatened to drive the foreigners and their missions out of the Empire. And now, Christians are in the Cabinet, and in the recently elected National

Assembly; the Provisional President is a man of pronounced Christian sympathies, who said, last autumn, to a group of Christians, "I am not a Christian, but I admire the wonderful teachings of Christianity, and am trying to live by them," and who, some years ago, issued a "Primer of Christianity," that the Chinese people might have a more intelligent and sympathetic idea of the religion of Jesus. And this Government now sends a request for prayer, not to the priests and temples of its ancient faiths, but to the Christians alone, as if recognizing in them the vital religious power of the nation to-day.

What does this mean? We must be careful not to assume that it means the speedy conversion of the Chinese people to the Christian religion. It may mean that, There are peculiar and powerful contacts between the ancient religions of the Chinese and Christianity. Many of their traditional customs are similar to those which prevailed among the Hebrews. A group of Chinese students told me last summer of the absorbed interest with which they read in the law of Moses that the Hebrews were, at a certain season, to fasten to the door of the house a bunch of hyssop, and to sprinkle blood above it. Said they, "We and our fathers have been, for centuries past, at a certain time in the year, nailing on the door of the house a bunch of grass and above it a bit of red paper, which, we were told, represents blood." And this, they said, was but one of many customs analogous to what they found in the Old Testament. "Why should not our religion be to us just as truly a school-master, leading us up to the truth in Christ, as the religion of the Jews was to them?" they asked eagerly. The ethics of Confucius are, in large part, pure and lofty. Taoism, the ancient religion of the Chinese, means "the way" and is largely a way of life, a system of morality. The tolerant and sympathetic attitude of the modern missionary, who is eager to discover

the elements and germs of truth already in the Chinese mind and soul, helps to make the approach to Christianity more natural. Even customs which formerly seemed heathenish are now seen to be not wholly incompatible with the Christian faith. One of the Chinese students to whom I have referred was the grand-daughter of a famous general, whose memorial tablet was erected in a public hall in recognition of his distinguished services. "Have you given up your visits and offerings to the tablet of your grand-father since you became a Christian?" she was asked. "No; why should I? Do not Christians erect tablets and stones to their loved ones, and on certain days visit them and put flowers there? I am careful to explain that I am not worshipping my grand-father, simply honoring his memory; but on the set days I go and honor him, and thank God for what he was."

It is then scarcely too much to say that the Chinese have less to leave behind, a more easy transition to make in becoming Christians, than almost any other race. Their religions are systems of ethics rather than of faith; and the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ will not so much supplant as purify, modify, and vitalize the religious life of the earnest people of China.

Yet, while there is thus in the religious conditions much on which to base a hope that the conversion of the Chinese may be speedy and complete, and while the Christian is always justified in expecting great things from God, still the message brought to us by this call to prayer is no easy assurance that China will speedily be Christian. It is very much more solemn, more searching, more personal, than that. "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified." If we, calling ourselves Christians, have in us anything of the Christ-spirit, even so much as a grain of mustard seed, our souls will be stirred as was His soul when the Greeks asked to see Him, stirred to a deeper realiza-

tion of the mission on which God sends us, and of the consecration it demands. It was immediately after these words that our Lord uttered the great saying, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." God help us to hear in this call of an un-Christian people for Christian prayer a summons to such a devoted, self-sacrificing religion as we have never shown or known.

The people of China are reaching out their hands for the very religion you and I are professing. Are you going to fail them? It is not a question of the truth of Christianity in the abstract, of the power and love of God. We believe all that to be true. But the Christianity that will minister the grace of God to the needy and longing world is *your* Christianity and *mine*.

"By all ye will, or whisper,
By all ye leave, or do;
The silent, sullen peoples
Will judge *your God* and you."

It is time every Christian, every dweller in a Christian community, startled in his careless walk by this cry for spiritual help, should ask himself, "What have *I* to give? How much good would it do the people of China to have such a Christian faith and life as *I* possess?"

As never before in the history of the Christian religion, "the hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified." That means that Christians must pitch their religious life, their faith, their consecration, very high. We must lift Jesus Christ up from the earth, you and I, the whole church, the whole body of believers in Him; we must humble ourselves, and bend our backs, and give our strength, to set Him where He can be seen and felt around the globe. It is not for low places, but from the heights, that the electrical energy of

His faith and life can throb so mightily that the watchers on that distant shore can catch the message.

It is not alone China that is calling us. I cannot and must not begin to mention the calls that come to us to-day from our own land and from every land. The whole world is crying out its one great need, and this is it,—that Christians shall be *real* and thorough-going, that we cease playing at being religious and begin to look at our mission as Jesus saw His. China and her call for prayer is but the most outstanding figure, the most unique and dramatic voice in the great chorus of need and longing that cries out to the church, “O men and women who say you believe in Christ, make your religion real! Lift it up! Climb to the new heights of vision, devotion, and achievement! The age demands not little things, but *miracles*, and *you* must work them. The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified.”

I want to direct the force of this message to two special groups. It comes first to those who in their hearts believe in Jesus Christ, but have never made definite public confession of that faith. And it asks of each, “Is it not time you helped to glorify the Son of Man by avowing yourself His follower?”

It is true that church-membership is only an outward form, and that true confession of faith in Christ is a deep, far reaching matter of the whole life. But it is true also that the outward form is important; men see that, and by it they interpret the spirit within. And the hour is come, now, when all who believe in Christ should take their places in His church.

I am heartily glad that I can say to all here, and to all the world, that absolutely nothing is demanded of one who would become a member of the church save a real and practical faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the glory of the Presbyterian Church that it asks nothing more of those who would be

its members than Christ asks of those who would be His followers. I beg of you, cast away, once and for all time, the mistaken notion that a confession of faith means a confession of theology. What the church asks of you in order to membership is not that you merely hold certain intellectual positions; it is that, in your heart, you believe in God, His love, His work in the world, and in Jesus Christ the Saviour, His Kingdom, His power, His mission; and that with a faith not of the mind only, but even more of the heart and the will and the life. Will you side with spirit against flesh, with God against the world, with love against force, with the cross against crowns and shows, with eternal life and not with shams, with Jesus rather than with His enemies? And *will you put your soul into that choice?* That is all we ask. Has not the hour come when you, who silently cherish that choice in your heart, can glorify your Lord by an open avowal?

It does count for very much, that open avowal. Just a week ago the will of a remarkable and powerful man was made public. He was a man who believed in deeds rather than in words. But nothing that he did ever lifted up and glorified the Lord in whom he believed more effectively than did the solemn and direct words in which, dealing with his great possessions, he first committed his soul in faith to its Saviour, and gave to his family as its greatest treasure the service of God and the defence of the Christian faith. Honest avowal of faith is a mighty means of glorifying the Lord in whom you believe. Ask yourself, I beseech you, if the hour has not come for you to confess the faith of your heart and enter the ranks of Christ's open and avowed followers?

But the call of this great hour comes with equal force to all of us who have confessed our faith, and are enrolled as members of the church of Christ.

To us the message is, Rise to a new pitch of loyalty and devotion. This is no ordinary time, when we can well be content with little loyalties, and modest sacrifices, and smooth-running religious experiences. God has counted us worthy of being Christians in a critical time. Upon us, as upon no men since the words were spoken, "the ends of the ages have met." To fail now is as if Paul had failed, or Luther, or Wesley, or Carey, or Livingstone. Our Lord is asking His church, "Can ye not discern the signs of the times?" For years prophets have been telling us that a new day was at hand. Lonely voices they were at first, crying through the dark. But now the dumbest eyes can see the dawn breaking. It is here, the new day of the Kingdom of God. If we, who are Christians, make our religion real, dominant, sacrificial, if we follow our Lord with such loyalty and consecration and simplicity as the time demands, the world that cries out for the grace of God will not cry out in vain. We must not draw back, or grow weary, or withhold. Our whole souls, and all they possess, must turn to God and to His work. The hour is come that we should show, in our local church, in the work of our denomination in city, and nation, and world, in the still larger interests of the Kingdom of God, a Christian faith, loyalty and devotion such as alone can glorify the Son of Man in the eyes of the world that needs Him.

These are plain words; and I know full well that those who need them least will feel them most keenly. I am not urging upon anyone unqualifiedly that he confess his faith, or that he lift his life to a new level of Christian consecration. "God alone is Lord of conscience." I know there are many whose reasons for keeping their faith unconfessed in words are righteous and conclusive; I would not, if I could, put an atom of pressure upon such souls. I know,—God forbid that I should ever be unmindful of it,—how many of the

members of this church are already revealing in their lives a loyalty, a consecration, a willingness to give and spend and work, which is worthy even of the present great and critical hour. But there is no one of us who may not well put to his inmost soul the searching question, "Is my religion as true, as far-going, as loyal, as sacrificial, as Christ has a right to expect it to be in this crucial hour?"

There was a little couplet much in use ten years ago :

"What kind of a church would our church be,
If every member were just like me?"

Call it simple, childish, doggerel, if you will. But there is in it something that claims the attention of your soul, a righteous demand you cannot evade. Is it not the deep and sacred duty of every one of us to be such a Christian that, if every member of Christ's church were like us, the church would be equal to its task? May we not well ask, each of himself, "Is that what I am? Would the interest of Christ's Kingdom be safe and strong, here in our church, and through the world, if *my* Christianity were the prevailing type?" And what right have I to live on any lower level of service and sacrifice than that which the call of Christ and the needs of His work demand of every Christian.

May the God of all grace make us worthy of this day, of this hour. It is glorious to live and work in the early hours of one of God's great days. That is our priceless privilege. "Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." For the spirit of God cries to us as to the people of God ages ago, "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion. Put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem. Shake thyself from the dust. For the hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified." Amen!



Sun Yat Sen and family in front of door of church at Tsingtau, China, with local Christian leaders. He preached in the church on Sunday, refusing invitations to dine on that day with prominent business men in the City of Tsingtau.

NEW CHINA RECOGNIZED BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

On May 2nd, 1913, Mr. Edward T. Williams delivered to President Yuan-Shih-Kai, at the Winter Palace, Peking, the following message from President Wilson:

"The Government and people of the United States of America, having abundantly testified their sympathy with the people of China upon their assumption of the attributes and powers of self-government, deem it opportune at this time, when the representative National Assembly has met to discharge the high duty of setting the seal of full accomplishment upon the aspirations of the Chinese people, that I extend in the name of my Government and my countrymen, a greeting of welcome to the new China, thus entering into the family of Nations.

"In taking this step I entertain the confident hope and expectation that in perfecting a republican form of Government the Chinese Nation will attain to the highest degree of development and well-being, and that under the new rule all the established obligations of China which pass to the Provisional Government will in turn pass to and be observed by the Government established by the assembly."

To which Yuan-Shih-Kai responded:

"In the name of the Republic of China, I thank you most heartily for the message of recognition which you have sent me through your honored representative in this Capital, the sentiments of amity and good will which it bespeaks. The expression of greeting and welcome which it conveys at once testifies to the American spirit of mutual helpfulness, and adds another brilliant page to the history of seventy years of uninterrupted friendly intercourse between China and the United States.

"Though unfamiliar with the republican form of Government, the Chinese people are yet fully convinced of the soundness of the principle which underlies it, and which is so luminously represented by your glorious commonwealth. The sole aim of the Government which they have established, therefore, is and will be to preserve this form of Government, and to perfect its working to the end that they enjoy its unalloyed blessings, prosperity, and happiness within; through union of law and liberty and peace and friendship without; through the faithful execution of all established obligations."

No such opportunity has ever been given to the Christian Church as now confronts it in the Republic of China.



Reception to returning missionaries, March 13, 1913. Lien Chow Christians.
On October 28, 1905, four missionaries suffered a martyr's death at Lien Chow.